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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000274

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 260

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 261

Classified By: Acting DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turnout for the Iraqi provincial elections held 31 January, 2009 was 51 percent nationwide, according to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC). The votes have been counted, and the tally sheets are arriving in Baghdad two days after the elections, and the IHEC expects to announce preliminary results by 5 February. Certified results are expected by 23 February. While there have been complaints of fraud and disenfranchisement of voters, the United Nations and other professional observers such as IFES and NDI do not feel that the outcome of these elections will be called into question. Iraq's political parties are moving vigorously to stake their claim to the results and shape public debate, even as official results are several days from being announced. End Summary.

Next Steps

[1](#)2. (C) Several complaints about voters being turned away from the polls and accusations of fraud at polling places have been reported in the press. The IHEC will only investigate and act upon complaints that are officially filed by Iraqis registered to vote, political entities, party agents, and civil society organizations. Complaints must be filed within 72 hours of the alleged infraction. It is impossible at this stage to estimate the number of official complaints the IHEC will receive. Following the special needs voting carried out 28 January the IHEC received 222 complaints. Sandra Mitchell, UNAMIS election officer and advisor to the IHEC, commented that this number was very low and a good sign that the special needs voting had been administered well.

[1](#)3. (U) Speaking about the complaints and accusations in the press, IHEC Chairman Faraj al-Haidari told a press conference on February 1 that the incidents would be investigated, but they are not of a scale that would alter the results of the election. Speaking specifically about media reports of voters being turned away from the polls, Haidari said that many voters had gone to the wrong polling center and were instructed to go to the correct location. He noted that voters had the opportunity to change their address or to ensure their registration details were correct during the voter registration update in August 2008. Those who did not do so may have gone to the wrong polling center. IHEC staff had acted correctly, he said, by telling voters to go to the correct center.

[1](#)4. (U) Haidari announced that 7.5 million Iraqis voted in the provincial elections, 51 percent of those registered to vote. Sean Dunne, Chief of Party of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), highlighted that the Iraqi voter registry was drawn directly from the Ministry of Trade's food distribution list. Every Iraqi, over the age of 18 in 2009, eligible for food rationing is automatically registered to vote. (Comment: With a passive voter

registration system, citizens who have no wish or intention to vote are automatically registered, resulting in lower turnout percentages than one would expect from a community where registration requires citizens to be proactive and register. U.S. Mission election observers in the field spoke with many voters and local election officials who attributed the relatively light turnout to the vehicle curfew, imposed for security reasons. The curfew appears to have had a particular impact in rural areas where voters had to travel significant distances to vote. End comment).

Initial Reactions from Political Parties
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15. (C) With official results still days away from being announced, political entities are moving briskly to shape the public debate and stake their claims over the results.

-- Ali al-Dabbagh, the GOI's official spokemsan was quoted by Al-Jazeera on February 2 predicting major advances for PM Maliki's "State of Law" electoral list.

-- While the media is predicting embarrassing setbacks for ISCI - the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a spokesman for the group claimed ISCI would "place first or second" in eleven provinces. Some media reports quoted anonymous ISCI politicians acknowleging likely losses in provincial councils across the south.

-- A senior Iraqi Islamic Party contact told us the party was projecting first place finishes in Diyala, Anbar, and Salah Eddin Provinces. In Baghdad province, the party expected to

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finish third, with a minimum of 7 (of 57) seats. In Anbar, the IIP was "at least 10 points" ahead of prominent tribal leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha's Awakening council. The IIP was also expecting a "surprisingly strong showing" in mainly Shi'a Basra. The most disappointing result for the IIP appeared to be in Ninewa, he continued, attributing the result to troubled Kurdish-Sunni Arab relations in the province. He expected the "Hadba," which appealed to anti-Kurdish sentiments among Sunni voters, to finish first.

-- Sunni politician Hassan Deghan (anti-IIP), whose National Dialogue Council (NDC) allied with ex-Ba'thist Salih Mutlaq's National Dialogue Front complained to poloff on February 2 that 25-30 percent of voters in the mainly Sunni NDC strongholds of Mahmoudiya, Saidiya, and Dura (in Baghdad's southern environs) were "mysteriously" absent from the voter's list.

-- Initial reports leaked to PRT by GEO Directors in Karbala and Diwaniyah indicate that Da'wa won the most votes (in the 30 percent range), with Allawi's party ahead of ISCI in both provinces. ISCI used to dominate in Diwaniyah.

-- Contacts with Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's Iraq National List believe they have done quite well in several provinces. Coupled with the expected large victories by Maliki's State of Law list in southern Iraq and Baghdad, they hope this heralds the emergence of a new, more secular era in Iraqi politics. As independent Shia parliamentarian Qassim Daoud commented to the press, the INL's showing in the polls "reflects that Iraqi society is looking for alternatives" they do not necessarily believe that the Islamists should lead the country.

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